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Message Text

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64
ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9064
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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJ: DROUGHT CONDITIONS

REF: STATE 127148

1. RAINFALL IN BARBADOS OVER PAST FOUR YEARS HAS BEEN 12 PERCENT AND IN WINDWARD/LEEWARD ISLANDS ABOUT 8 PERCENT BELOW PREVIOUS 75-YEAR AVERAGE. AVERAGE RAINFALL VARIES WIDELY IN NINE ISLAND GROUPINGS UNDER EMBASSY'S JURISDICTION, RANGING FROM UNDER 40 INCHES ANNUALLY IN SOUTHERN PART OF BARBADOS TO UP TO 300 INCHES ANNUALLY IN MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF DOMINICA. ADDITIONALLY, RAINFALL HAS NOT ONLY BEEN BELOW NORMAL IN AMOUNT, IT HAS ALSO BEEN IRREGULAR IN AMOUNTS, I.E. INSTEAD OF BEING SPREAD OVER A WEEK-LONG PERIOD, A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RAINFALL MAY OCCUR DURING A TWO OR THREE HOUR PERIOD, RESULTING IN NON-RETENTION OF SURFACE WATER.

2. CARIBBEAN METEOROLOGICAL INSTITUTE EMPHASIZES THAT ABOVE WEATHER PHENOMENON IS LARGE SCALE PROBLEM WHICH IS DUE TO CHANGES IN MOVEMENT PATTERNS OF HIGH PRESSURE SYSTEMS IN AREA. ORDINARILY A HIGH PRESSURE AREA MOVES WELL TO NORTH DURING RAINY SEASON PER-MITTING MOISTURE LADEN EASTERLY WINDS TO REACH AREA. IN RECENT YEARS, THIS SYSTEM HAS REMAINED 6-7 DEGREES SOUTH OF ITS NORMAL PATH RESULTING IN DIMINISHED MOISTURE COMING FROM EAST.

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3. EFFECT OF PHENOMENON ON AGRICULTURE VARIES WIDELY. BARBADOS

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AND ST. KITTS' SUGAR PRODUCERS CLAIM THAT DIMINISHED RAINFALL IS PRIME FACTOR IN LOWER YIELDS AT TIME WHEN PRICE IS AT RELATIVELY HIGH LEVEL (IN BARBADOS 1975 SUGAR CROP IS LOWEST SINCE 1948). DROUGHT CONDITIONS ARE ALSO ALLEGED TO HAVE DIMINISHED BANANA AND OTHER CROPS IN WINDWARD ISLANDS OVER PAST FEW YEARS, RESULTING IN CONSIDERABLE LOSS OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE FOR THESE POOR ECONOMIES. EFFECT ON FOOD CROPS ALSO DEPENDS ON AGRICULTURAL SITUATION OF TERRITORY INVOLVED. ANTIGUA, BARBADOS AND ST. KITTS IMPORT MOST FOODSTUFFS, HENCE DIMINISHED LOCAL PRODUCTION WOULD HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON AVERAGE INHABITANT. WINDWARD ISLANDS DO, HOWEVER, PRODUCE CONSIDERABLE PROPORTION OF FOOD CONSUMED BUT DROUGHT CONDITIONS HAVE APPARENTLY NOT BEEN SO SEVERE AS TO AFFECT FOOD PRODUCTION SIGNIFICANTLY IN THOSE ISLANDS WHICH HAVE WET UPLAND AREAS (GRENADA, ST. LUCIA, ST. VINCENT, DOMINICA).

4. IN SUMMARY THEN, DROUGHTCONDITIONS DEFINITELY OBTAIN IN BARBADOS AND AREAS OF LOW ELEVATION OF LEEWARD ISLANDS. WINDWARD ISLANDS, WHICH HAVE UPLAND AREAS, ARE CONTINUING TO RECEIVE ADQUATE RAINFALL IN HIGHER REGIONS BUT ARE EXPERIENCING DROUGHT IN LOWLANDS WHICH HAS ADVERSELY AFFECTED CROPS. DROUGHT APPARENTLY HAS BEEN A FACTOR IN RECENT LOW SUGAR AND BANANA YIELDS.
SIMMS

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